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— — — *Secernere sacra profanis.*

HOR.



WALKING the other day in *Westminster* Abbey, among the many ostentatious monuments erected to kings and warriors, I could not help observing a little stone, on which was this pompous inscription — *Æternæ Memoræ Sacrum* — Sacred to the Eternal Memory of —: The name of the person, to whom immortality was thus secured, is almost obliterated; and perhaps, when alive, he was little known, and as soon forgot by the small circle of his friends and acquaintance.

I HAVE been used to look upon epitaphs as a kind of flattering dedications to the dead; in which is set down a long catalogue of virtues, (that nobody knew they were

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possessed

possessed of while living) and not a word of their vices or follies. The veracity of these posthumous encomiums may, indeed, be fairly suspected, as we are generally told, that the disconsolate widow, or weeping son, erected the monument in testimony of their affliction for the loss of the kindest husband, or most affectionate father. But what dowager, who gets a comfortable jointure by her good man's decease, would refuse to set her hand to it on his tomb-stone, that he was the best of husbands; though perhaps they had parted beds? or what heir would be so base and ungrateful, as not to give a few good words to a crabbed parent after his death, in return for his estate?

By the extravagant praises, which are indiscriminately lavished on the ashes of every person alike, we entirely pervert the original intent of epitaphs, which were contrived to do honour and justice to the virtuous and the good: But by the present practice the reputations of men are equally confounded with their dust in the grave, where there is no distinction between the good and the bad. The law has appointed searchers to enquire, when any one dies, into the cause of his death: in the same manner I could wish, that searchers were appointed to examine into his way of living, before a character be given of him upon the tomb-stone.

THE flatteries, that are paid to the deceased, are undoubtedly owing to the pride of their survivors, which is the same among the lowest as the highest set of people. When an obscure grocer or tallow-chandler dies at his lodgings at *Islington*, the news-papers are stuffed with the same parade of his virtues and good qualities, as when a duke goes out of the world: and the petty overseer of a little hamlet

hamlet has a painted board with the initials of his name stuck up at the end of his wicker'd turf, while the noblemen repose under a grand mausoleum erected to his memory, with a long list of his titles and heroic deeds.

THE Great, indeed, have found means to separate themselves even in their graves from the vulgar, by having their ashes deposited in churches and cathedrals, and covered by the most superb monuments. In my late visit to *Westminster* Abby, I could not but remark the difference of Taste, which has prevailed in setting up these edifices for the dead. In former times, we find, that they were content to clap up the bust or statue of the deceased, set round perhaps with the emblems of his merits, his employment, or station of life. If any person was remarkable for his virtue and piety, it was pointed out by two or three little chubby-faced cherubims, who were crying for his death, or holding a crown over his head. The warrior was spread along at full length in a complete suit of armour, with the trophies of war hung round about him; and the bishop was laid flat upon his back, with his coifed head resting on a stone bible, and his hands joined together in the posture of praying.

IF *Socrates*, or any other of the ancient Philosophers could revive again, and be admitted into *Westminster* Abby, he would be induced to fancy himself in a *Pantheon* of the Heathen Gods. The Modern Taste, (not content with introducing *Roman* temples into our Churches, and representing the Virtues under allegorical images) has ransacked all the fabulous accounts of the Heathen Theology to strike out new embellishments for our *Christian* monuments. We are not in the least surpris'd to see *Mercury* attending the

the tomb of an orator, and *Pallas* or *Hercules* supporting that of a warrior. *Milton* has been blamed for his frequent allusions to the Heathen Theology in his Sacred Poem: but surely we are more to be condemned, for admitting the whole class of their fictitious deities into the House of God itself.

If there is not a stop put to this Taste, we may soon expect to see our churches, instead of being dedicated to the service of religion, set apart for the reception of the Heathen Gods. A deceased admiral will be represented like *Neptune*, with a trident in his hand, drawn in a shell by dolphins, preceded by *Tritons*, and followed by *Nereids* lashing the marble waves with their tails. A general will be habited like *Mars*, bearing an helmet and spear in polished stone; and a celebrated toast will be stuck up naked, like the *Venus de Medicis*, cut in alabaster.

It has been proposed (on a different account) to have a separate place distinct from our churches, for the reception of our monuments. I could wish to see such a scheme put in execution: for the present absurd mixture of the several objects of *Pagan* and *Christian* belief, as represented on the tombs lately set up in compliance of the modern taste, must be shocking to every serious beholder. Our pious forefathers were content with exhibiting to us the usual emblems of death, the hour-glass, the skull, and the cross-marrow-bones: but these are not sufficient for our present more refined age: The Three Fatal Sisters, mentioned in the Heathen Mythology, must be introduced spinning, drawing, and cutting the thread of life. Could one of the last century see a winged figure blowing a trumpet on the top
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of a modern monument, he would be apt to mistake it for an arch-angel, and be naturally put in mind of that awful time, "when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise." But the design, we are told, is very different; and this winged messenger is no other than the ancient personage of Fame, who is proclaiming the virtues of the defunct round the world.

SHOULD any one propose to take down from *St. Paul's Cathedral* those paintings of *Sir James Thornhill* representing the transactions of *St. Paul*, and in their place to set up *Titian's* pictures of the amours of the Heathen Gods and Goddesses, every one would be shocked at the impiety of the proposal. Nor is the fashion of introducing Heathen Deities into our monuments much less absurd: for while any of those are suffered to remain in our Churches, the reproof of our Saviour concerning the Temple at *Jerusalem* may perhaps become applicable to the present times—"My House is an House of Prayer; but ye have made it a DEN OF THIEVES."

I HOPE I shall not be thought too grave or whimsical, if I earnestly recommend it to the consideration of those whom it may concern, whether a reformation is not necessary in our Churches, to purge them from these prophane images; which, though not the objects of our idolatry, have no more pretence to be set up in the Temple of the Living Lord, than those of the canonized Saints of the *Roman Catholics*.

MODERN Taste is continually striking out new improvements. We may therefore conclude, that when our statu-

aries have travelled through the ancient *Pantheon*, and exhausted all the subjects of the *Grecian* and *Roman* Mythology, we shall have recourse to the superstitions of other nations for the designs of our monuments. They will then probably be adorned with *Ægyptian* Hieroglyphics, and the tomb of some future hero may be built according to the model of the Prophet's tomb at *Mecca*. It is not to be doubted, but that the *Chinefe* Taste, which has been already introduced into our gardens, our buildings, and our furniture, will also soon find its way into our Churches; and how elegant must a monument appear, which is erected in the *Chinefe* Taste, and embellished with dragons, bells, Pagods, and Mandarins!